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Eritrean Liberation Front

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MUNGER AFRICANA LIBRARY NOTES

One Dollar

Issue #13

September, 1972

ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT: A CLOSE-UP VIEW

by

Richard Lobban

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FRONT COVER: Pelle fetish figure. Wood. Nimba region,
Liberia. 21 inches.

INTRODUCTION

Eritrea is one of the least known guerilla warfronts in the world. It may not remain so because of the deep American interest in Ethiopia, which is centered upon the electronic base at Kagnew, in Ethiopia, and has an annual official U.S. budget of \$12.7 million.

It is fairly common knowledge that the heavy U.S. military aid to Ethiopia, which began in 1953, was fundamentally in return for the right to use the Kagnew base from that time until 1978. All this was in the atmosphere of Ethiopian support in the Korean war only two years before, when the Ethiopians sent more infantry than any other country in Africa. There is evidence that the dependence of the U.S. upon Kagnew may be drawing to a close before the Treaty ends in 1978. The "Symington Committee" of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee concluded in 1971 that "some of its earlier missions are now accomplished by satellites; others could be accomplished by facilities in other countries." A likely candidate as a base is the British Island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, where the U.S. and U.K. are moving to establish extensive facilities. In 1970 it was announced that \$19 million would be spent there by 1973.

The original U.S. intention was to help Ethiopia maintain internal order. Total aid to that poor country is now pushing towards \$1 billion. More than one-half of all the U.S. military aid to Africa has been going to Ethiopia. This aid ranges from jets to M-14 rifles. In addition, Ethiopia also receives an Imperial Lion of Judah's share of economic aid. Projections for the next five years show a leveling off of U.S. aid--at its high current level--although more aid is to be given to Nigeria and Ghana, which, in the past, have trailed Ethiopia in receiving U.S. support.

The U.S. did not contemplate that its military aid to Ethiopia would be used to suppress an active guerilla movement aimed at national liberation of a people. This sticky situation is compounded by the fact that a major presence of U.S. military equipment is considered to be the chief prop of the Ethiopian government against various attempted coups. Three U.S.-equipped battalions have been active in Eritrea. A U.S. major and two non-coms are at Kagnew as advisers. At the same time the U.S. Peace Corps mounted a major educational effort at both the primary and secondary school levels, the social impact of which is not yet fully measurable.

The political future of Ethiopia and of American interests at Kagnew are clouded by the knowledge that the incredible Haile Selassie cannot live forever. (Selassie's visits to Kagnew normally include seeing the American dentist there.) Haile Selassie has done a remarkable job of statesmanship, mixed with political cunning and ruthlessness, in trying to modernize a feudal state without revolution. On my own visits to Ethiopia and through conversations with Haile Selassie and his sons, I have gained a great admiration for his acumen. Against seemingly impossible odds, the headquarters of the OAU were established in Addis Ababa. It is geographically isolated. Communications by land are almost impossible. It is landlocked except for Eritrea. It has a Christian minority ruling a Muslim majority, and it is almost surrounded by Muslim peoples. Furthermore, until the mid-1950s, the contempt the Ethiopians had for "black Africans" was so great, it was one reason Ethiopia refused to send students on a cooperative venture to the then-medical school for East Africa at Makerere College in Uganda. Finally, in an era during which the wave of African nationalism overtook most of colonial Africa, Ethiopia became an anachronism headed by his Imperial Highness!

There is no question but that the U.S. has gained important military advantages from Kagnew--in communications, and various areas of code breaking and electronic warfare generally. The personal visit by Chief of Staff General Westmoreland in 1971 is an indication of its importance. However, there is evidence that Kagnew's role in listening to Soviet stations has declined in value. Now the base is caught up in guerilla struggles, the defense of it and of the Ethiopian government is fraught with possibilities for unhealthy U.S. involvement. Already a U.S. courier has been murdered near Kagnew.

Haile Selassie may have seen the handwriting on the wall. With undiminished shrewdness, he has moved to undercut the Eritrean Liberation Front, first, with military supporters of the ELF in Peking, and, second, with ELF's Sudanese friends who have provided the safe sanctuary so essential to most successful guerilla movements.

In October, 1971, the Emperor visited China and conferred with Premier Chou En Lai and praised Mao Tse Tung for his "outstanding achievements." During the six-day state visit, the first in 5,000 years by a foreign Emperor, the Ethiopian leader signed trade pacts involving \$80 million in interest-free loans to improve Ethiopia's commercial position. He praised the Chinese for being in a position to help the development of Third World countries. This visit was made, of course, before the American Presidential visit, and at a time when Peking was seeking African friends in her U.N. struggle for recognition vis-a-vis Taiwan.

The second move by the Emperor was his successful behind the scenes efforts, along with the World Council of Churches, to mediate between the rebellious southern Sudanese and the government in Khartoum. The remarkable agreement which emerged in Addis Ababa in March, 1972, gives great promise of ending the sixteen-year long civil war and the devastation of the Christian and pagan south. This agreement guarantees no trials of rebels. It also provides for the inclusion of southerners in the governing body for the south, and the incorporation of guerilla units to form a southern Sudan defense force.*

If the Sudanese government carries out its bargain, it is likely that its relations with Ethiopia will continue to improve. This may spell trouble for the ELF training camps just across from the Ethiopian border. The various southern groups have called upon their followers to support the Addis agreement and to reassure the northerners that the autonomy they have attained within a united Sudan is not the prelude to a move for independence by the south.

Both the pact with China and the Sudanese settlement have a value to Ethiopia in another dimension. They will discourage centripetal political movements. Haile Selassie has been faced with a whole series of regional uprisings, not just the one in Eritrea. There has been trouble in the Ogaden, Bule, Gojjam, and Tigre. The abortive coup of 1960, led by U.S.-trained Girname Neway, was a sign of discontent with the pace of modernization. The 1968 conspiracy by Galla officers--not U.S.-trained--was essentially regional in nature, rather than liberal. And periodically, the Emperor has felt compelled to close the University for what he felt were student threats to gradual modernization.

The amazing 79-year-old Emperor may not be at the end of his diplomatic involvements, if the local threats to Amharic rule are to be postponed, at least during his lifetime. He has accepted an invitation to visit the Kingdom of Lesotho, and this would plunge him directly into the question of South Africa and its outward-bound policy of "dialogue."

It is within such broader contexts that this issue of the "Notes" is concerned with the Eritrean Liberation Front.

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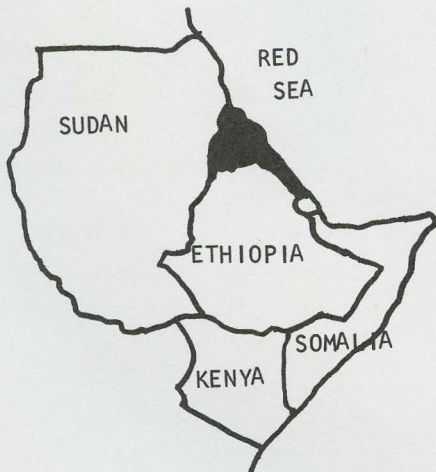
*See "Agreement Issue" of the Grass Curtain, Vol. 2, No. 3, May, 1972, featuring cover photographs of Sudanese President Nimeri and Major General Joseph Lagu of the Anya-Nya.

The author of this issue, Richard Lobban, is trained as an anthropologist. He took his B.S. at Bucknell, an M.A. at Temple University, and is currently completing his Ph.D. at Northwestern University. Since 1964 he has been active with various liberation movements, beginning with Frelimo in Tanzania.

Mr. Lobban went into Eritrea with the ELF to attend the First National Congress of the Eritrean Liberation Front. He traveled hard and dangerously while observing the operations of the liberation army and the response of villagers to it. In such a role he styles himself as a "progressive free-lance journalist." In common with many writers on the New Left, he likes to draw parallels between revolutionary movements on the left throughout the whole developing world, and conversely sees the United States as a rather reactionary if not imperialistic force in these situations.

The fact that Mr. Lobban was not actually able to attend the Congress he set out to attend, because it was postponed beyond his own time limits, does not invalidate his observations of the operation of the Eritrean guerilla movement. The details of the Congress, when it was subsequently held, were relayed to him by what he considers to be most reliable sources.

E. S. M.



1 5 0 miles

approximate route of march

* approximate location of Congress

RALJr

ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT: A CLOSE-UP VIEW

Richard Lobban

In October and November of 1971, the Eritrean Liberation Front held a political convention. My wife and I had been attending the trial of Rolf Steiner* in Khartoum when we, along with a number of other journalists, were kindly invited by the ELF to attend its first Conference deep inside liberated territory. For several reasons my wife declined to go, but I accepted. I went in the basic capacity of a free-lance, progressive journalist.

The Convention was hardly like those which require hotel registrations and meeting room reservations. It took some time before the final trek began after several delays. I entered Eritrea with a Scandinavian radio-t.v. journalist, various representatives of the ELF, and about 100 soldiers. At the border between the Sudan and Eritrea, it was necessary to abandon normal transportation and to proceed on foot. After crossing the frontier, we moved with soldiers from the Eritrean Liberation Army. On the way other village representatives joined us, and we frequently met other detachments on route.

We had walked for about a week when, deus ex machina, it was decided that the Congress was to be postponed. I gathered that this decision was made for security reasons, but I never knew the exact reason. I had already committed two weeks of really hard, hot, extremely thirsty, and very long marching. To attend the Conference would mean another month of waiting, plus a month at the Conference, and then another week or two of walking back out. My fellow Scandinavian journalist felt that he would have to leave, and, after some discussion, it became apparent that I would also. On the way out, I met two French and one Italian journalists and talked with them at great length, as well as with some Palestinians. These people all went on to attend the Conference. I arranged with them to meet afterwards, which we did in Khartoum. There we rehashed the Conference's major events, political directions, etc. In this way, although I was not able to attend the Conference myself, I received what I consider to be reliable first-hand

*The famous guerilla mercenary who fought in Biafra and in the southern Sudan. For an account of meeting Steiner inside the Sudan, see The Anya-Nya: Ten Months' Travel with its Forces inside the Southern Sudan by Allan Reed. Munger Africana Library Notes No. 11, February, 1972. [Ed.]

information from many of those who did attend. My walking experiences, if not the route, were virtually identical to theirs, and I gathered much information about the ELF, its army, and details of the Congress itself.

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What is this little-known war between Eritrea and Ethiopia all about? Isn't Ethiopia (one of Africa's poorest and most backward nations) a strongly unified state? Why should progressive people support this movement against an "independent" African country?

The question concerning what constitutes nationalism has been central to some of the most heated and divisive debates in revolutionary politics. It is generally agreed that a people must have a separate history, a separate territory, and a common language to truly qualify as a national entity. It happens that Eritrea meets these criteria, although there are several Eritrean linguistic stocks of which Tigré and Tigrina are perhaps the most significant. The majority of the ELA are Moslems (if they practice), while the dominant ruling Amharas of Ethiopia and of the Eritrean bourgeoisie (in the central mountain area), who maintain control over Ethiopia and Eritrea, are predominantly Christians.

The Eritrean war is considered by some to be separatist or religious in nature. In my view, it is clear that this struggle is not separatist, but nationalist. Ethiopian expansion is the chief cause of the strife. Because Ethiopia is dominated by a Christian ruling class, the resulting assumption often is that its enemies must be anti-Christian. Such an assumption only clouds the reality of the situation. What the ELA feels it is opposing is the solidarity of Christian rulers and their repressive feudal state. It is worth noting that only one member of the Imperial Cabinet is Moslem and he is not from Eritrea. On the other hand, there are many Christian members of the ELF. Perhaps a superficial analysis might suggest that the war is Muslim vs Christian in nature, but a closer examination of the situation would indicate that it is more between oppressed and oppressor.

The Ethiopian government consistently gives the percentage of Moslems in the province at 40%. Since the uncensused lowlands are solidly Moslem, and the central highlands have a very great admixture of Muslims and Christians, a percentage of Moslem at 70% is more accurate.* By stating that the Moslems are a lower percentage than they really are, the Ethiopians attempt to make the national liberation movement appear as an isolated action of a minority, when the opposite is the case.

*A student from Ethiopia agrees that the Ethiopian government always quotes a low figure for Muslims, but most accepted percentages are 50% Muslims and 50% Christians, with Muslims slightly in the majority. [Ed.]

Because the background of this war is not widely known, it is worthwhile to review some of the historical, political, and social factors underlying the conflict. Old Portuguese records reveal that there was always fighting between the kingdoms of Gondor and Lallibela in an age-old battle between the people of what is today Eritrea and the pulsating expansive drives of the Abyssinians. For hundreds of years this territory has been defended and attacked. The Tigré leader, Kasai, provided food and fodder for the British, who, on April 13, 1868, were led on a punitive mission by Field Marshall Lord Napier against Emperor Theodore, who represented Christian domination of the Tigré people, in the British assault at Magdala. During the 1880s the Italians colonized the coastal regions of Eritrea, and, by 1890, they had reached Asmara in the central highlands. The famous battle of Adowa in 1896 stopped further penetration by the Italians until their successful campaign of 1935-36. As these examples illustrate, the animosity between the two regions has been of long duration, whereas colonial history has remained separate from the situation.*

When Italy was defeated by the Allied Powers in 1941, the question of Eritrea's future was left to the United Nations. It wasn't until February 12, 1950, that the UN finally approved a resolution to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia, but with Eritrea as an "autonomous unit," recognizing its distinct character. This federation was effected by September 15, 1952, but only after many secret meetings between the Ethiopian and British and American administrators.

*The same Ethiopian student agrees that there were regional animosities and struggles between the various Abyssinian emperors and their vassals in the Eritrean region. But he does not consider these struggles to be unique with Eritrea nor based on any feeling of "Eritrean nationalism" or Pan Arabism at that time. He says: "The Eritrean struggle for independence, I believe, is more rooted in Eritrea's special colonial and post-colonial history in the last 80 years or so, during which Eritrea developed along separate lines from Ethiopia."

It is often forgotten that when Mussolini launched his attack on Ethiopia, primarily from Eritrea, the Italian forces contained local Eritrean units, many of which deserted to the Ethiopians. There were also Eritreans on the southern front, where Marshal Graziani was pushing north from Somalia. Here, too, much to Graziani's disgust, the Eritreans deserted to the Ethiopians and were mercilessly dealt with by the Italians when the fascists finally won. [Ed.]

Little by little the autonomy promised to Eritrea was eroded by the Ethiopian government. Opposition to this erosion was present in Eritrea in the early 1950s, but the political parties were not democratic and effective organization was lacking. By the late 1950s the Eritrean masses began to show cohesion as the Eritrean Liberation Movement, which underwent much political growth before it emerged in 1961 as the Eritrean Liberation Front. The details of this period have been recorded in many places, such as United Nations publications. Imperial authorities deemed it necessary to provide continuous police action between 1952 and 1962 in order to control restive Eritrea. By 1962, Ethiopia had banned all political parties there, independent newspapers were closed, the Eritrean flag was brought down, and Eritrea's Constitution and Parliament were suspended.

In 1961 the underground ELF organization had asked Hamad Idris Awate, a daring liberation fighter, to initiate armed resistance against the Ethiopians, as the only way they could see to possibly restore freedom and dignity to the Eritrean people. Emperor Haile Selassie's response to this move was unilaterally to declare, without vote or discussion of any kind, complete annexation of Eritrea on November 14, 1962, and abolishment of the UN resolution. Today, about three-fifths of Eritrea is considered to be liberated, which means that the enemy Ethiopian troops are not free to enter these areas, or if they do enter, they will be dealt with very severely and suffer heavy losses. Another fifth of the country constitutes the urban areas and military camps still under enemy control. The remaining portion is semi-liberated and, accordingly, the struggle is most intense in this region.

Ethiopia is one of Africa's poorest nations, with a \$66 income per capita. Africa itself is poor, but the average income is almost three times higher at \$171 per capita per year. The literacy rate of 7% of the total population of Ethiopia suggests part of the reason for such overwhelming poverty. Addis Ababa, the showplace capital, is literally built on the backs of the poverty stricken. Anyone who visits this capital cannot help but be struck by the gulf between the rich and poor. About one-third of the national budget of only \$208 million goes to security and defense to maintain the feudal grip of the Imperial classes. The period between 1964 and 1967 witnessed a 68.2% increase in these military expenses, as the war in Eritrea intensified, as well as hostilities between Ethiopia and Somalia.

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The Eritrean Liberation Front and its Liberation Army are organized on the lines of a guerilla military pattern. As such they seek

to inflict harm and embarrassment on the enemy while conserving their own strength. Attack when the enemy is resting and retreat when the enemy is attacking are basic principles. The ELA is very well armed, and, indeed, may be one of the best guerilla armies, militarily speaking, in Africa's multi-fronted wars of national liberation. This army is designed to be highly mobile and, depending on the terrain, can move more than sixty kilometers in one day if there is need. In the war so far the ELF has concentrated primarily on military targets and personnel in its military attacks. Symbols of the Imperial Government and its officials have also been targets for attack.

One of the ELF's more significant military actions took place on November 7, 1966, when seventeen Eritrean towns were simultaneously attacked at midnight while an OAU summit conference was being held in Addis Ababa. This was designed to focus world attention on the Eritrean struggle. Another action occurred on March 25, 1967, when a notorious official from the Ministry of the Interior was shot and killed. During a large-scale Ethiopian offensive, the ELA reported 793 Ethiopian soldiers killed, while their own losses were relatively slight.

In March 1969 the ELF blew up an Ethiopian Airlines plane at Frankfurt, Germany. In June of the same year another plane was attacked in Frankfurt and one was damaged in Karachi. In September a plane was hijacked to Khartoum and one to Aden. In December another hijack attempt was foiled over southern Europe. These events brought world attention to Eritrea. On May 17 and 19, 1969, railway tracks and bridges were destroyed between Djibouti and Ethiopia; an explosion occurred at the Ethiopian Consulate in Djibouti and another bomb exploded at the Central Bank in Addis Ababa.

These publicly observed incidents were all claimed by the ELF in their goal to disrupt the social and economic life of Ethiopia. In the period between January and May, 1971, more than fifty incidents were reported in seeking the ELF goal. Since 70% of Ethiopia's foreign trade goes through Eritrea to reach the ports of Assab or Massawa, disruption of this sort is very costly in time and money for Ethiopia.

A recent incident which received world-wide publication occurred near the central Eritrean city of Keren, which had earlier been occupied for eight hours in an ELA "mini-Tet" offensive (in that it sought only political goals, and military conquest was not the main concern). The ELA ambushed a train at a station and politely asked the passengers, including many military men, to disembark. Meanwhile, down the tracks another team had unfastened the railroad track at a trestle spanning a gorge. The train resumed its forward motion with no passengers and tumbled car by car into the gorge in a mass of fire

and crumpled metal. Not a shot was fired nor a pound of dynamite used, but an entire, militarily important, train was completely destroyed.

As the nature of the political struggle changed with a broader involvement of the masses, outside support also altered. Early in the war socialist countries were contributing much of the weaponry, either directly or through friendly countries. In June of 1965, eighteen tons of Czechoslovakian arms were seized in Khartoum. During this period and up until 1967, aid from Libya, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia was also known to be received. Some Egyptian weapons and advisors were reported. By 1971-72, little trace of these reactionary Arab states was to be seen. As such moderate and reactionary Arab countries drew back, Cuba and China began to show more interest in the movement. One reporter said in 1967 that the ELF "has no clearly defined ideological leanings..." This is no longer true today. Many officers have now returned from military and political training in Cuba, China, and those Arab countries which have reliably supported the Palestinian struggle to regain their lost homeland. The training is excellent and has produced "surprising discipline" among the soldiers as well as a "first rate intelligence network"--two waiters at the Kagnew radio base in Asmara were recently arrested as ELF spies. Relations with the Sudan have been unpredictable, depending upon the current regime in Khartoum. At the present the ELF Khartoum office is closed down and arms must move clandestinely across the border or across the Red Sea. In this regard, South Yemen is also important, as it lies just across from the Eritrean coastline and has a very militantly progressive political posture. Haile Selassie has recently made threats to deport all South Yemenese from Ethiopia unless their home government makes efforts to curb the smuggling.

As with most guerilla armies, the ELF has obtained large amounts of its weapons from the enemy. Old British rifles are common. The big British Bren machine gun is quite popular, as it delivers heavy firepower and is relatively light. Some American weapons are also found, especially sidearms. The crack ELA assault forces, however, are using the Klashnikov from Russia and Czechoslovakia, and the Chinese Simonov. Friendly socialist and progressive countries have helped to make these contributions. Hand grenades and heavy anti-tank weapons and other explosives are also part of the ELA armory. Each of the efficient soldiers is given nine months of military and political training inside liberated territory. It is incredible to watch 75 armed men just disappear into rocky terrain right before your eyes. Each footstep of a soldier demands a constant search for the next rock, tree, or dry river bed from which to make a defense.

The Ethiopian statistics about the strength of the ELF are not accurate. It is these statistics that western news sources rely upon. For a long time the Ethiopian government figures indicated that only 1,000 soldiers were in the ELF. These figures have been regularly updated, and now Ethiopia acknowledges that there may be as many as 3,000. In 1969 the ELF estimated that it had 8,000 under arms. Naturally, ALL of these figures are tentative, but they do illustrate the regular tendency of the Ethiopian authorities to underplay their enemy's strength.

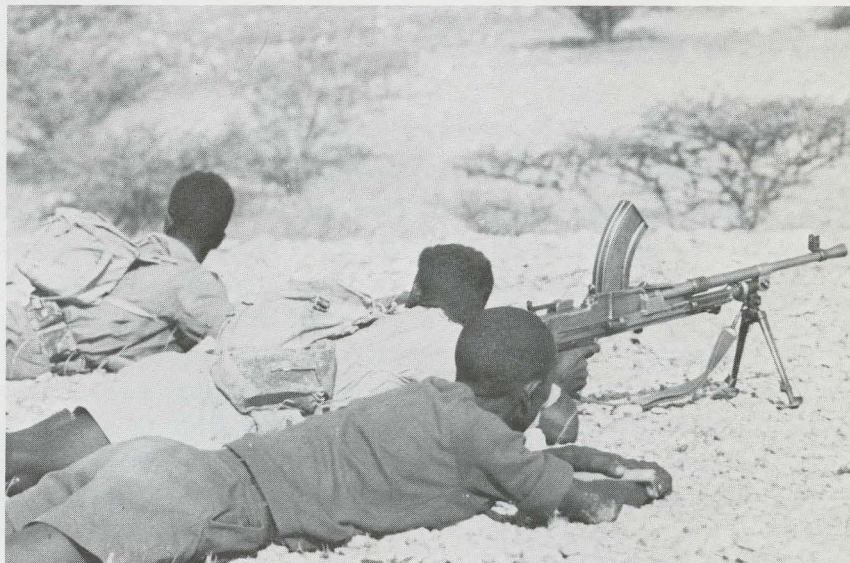
Frequently, the only knowledge of this movement is from the press service of Ethiopia, which, besides playing down their own losses, labels the ELA as "bandits." Having walked for 500 kilometers and spent two weeks inside liberated territory, I can only conclude that this statement is just nonsense. First of all, the environment of Eritrea consists of flat dry plains, except at the Sudanese border and in the central mountainous zones. The East is virtually desert and is sparsely populated. To live in such areas requires both knowledge of the terrain and assistance from the local people. On our march I saw countless examples of the close relationship between the ELA and the people--since their interests are the same. As an example, we traveled with some heavy equipment and material which needed camels for transportation. Each village provided us with the camels which took us to the next village, where we were provided with fresh animals to continue onward. Each village also took care of drinking water and unending amounts of fresh sweet milk. If the ELA was interested in more substantial food, they could buy a goat or a sheep from any village or herdsman. Sometimes we slept in villages, although, for security reasons, we usually slept outside of the villages themselves. Villages also supply valuable and accurate intelligence of enemy movements, whether by ground or by air. Each village is organized with its own democratically elected representatives in the ELF. All legal matters are adjudicated by the ELF, whether concerning military questions or simple civil disputes. In my experience, the ELF and the villagers are distinguishable only by weapons and uniforms; each village welcomed us with unhesitating friendship. This is not what you would expect to find if the ELA soldiers were only "bandits."

Although constant vigilance is maintained, most of the areas through which we traveled were completely liberated. One day a force of more than 100 soldiers was gathered to make a mock assault to illustrate battlefield tactics. It was in the middle of the afternoon in full daylight when the guns--both the Bren and automatic fire--opened upon fictive targets. The control of the territory was so complete that there was no concern for whatever enemy might be within listening distance.

R. Lobban



R. Lobban



E.L.F.



On a former occasion an ELA commander sent a note to an Ethiopian Army post to say that he would be visiting a village at a certain time and that he wanted no interference from the Ethiopian Army or the ELA would destroy the village. The Emperor's Army was forced to comply with the ELA's wishes, and the ELA then enjoyed a meal in town.

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The American trained and armed Ethiopian Army Second Division is in charge of the security and defense of Eritrea. Their brutal search and destroy missions have forced thousands out of the lowlands into neighboring Sudan, where they live a life of exile. Governor General Prince Asrate Kassa, who is a kinsman of the Emperor, and who once referred to the ELF as a "Mafia with Marxist cadres," has been replaced by a military governor, Debebe Haile Mariam, who administers martial law since the declaration of the State of Emergency. The 10,000 soldiers of the Second Division are fighting the same battle with the 4,500 police-commandos, who have been trained by the Israelis for counter-insurgency warfare.

The Ethiopian Army in Eritrea is composed of peasant recruits who have been fed the idea that the ELF is destroying the country. While these peasant soldiers and local mercenaries fight bravely, they have no sense of tactics, and, during any armed attack, the Ethiopian Army takes immense losses, while the ELA and its mobile units escape relatively untouched. This is not to say that the civilians have been immune from the terrorizing attacks of the Ethiopian Army. Some of the larger, and more recent, My-Lai-like massacres have occurred at Bascadara on November 27, 1970, when 112 people were herded into a mosque and shot down; at Keren on December 1, 1970, when more than 600 civilians lost their lives from Ethiopian-American napalm and ground action; and on January 27, 1971, when about sixty people were killed in a mosque at Elaberte.

Israeli military training has been carried out at Decmare at the Eritrean military school headed by Colonel Ben Nathaw who has already trained more than 5,000 soldiers. In addition, the Israelis train the Ethiopian Marine Commando Forces under Israeli Colonel Don. This force is extremely important in trying to stop the smuggling of arms across the Red Sea. Iskender Desta, the grandson of the Emperor, is formally in charge of the Red Sea blockade as the Commodore of the Navy. Desta's reputation as international playboy contributes to the ineffectuality of the blockade. Israeli bases on strategic islands in the Red Sea and the activities in Eritrea and

Ethiopia are part of its deep interest in African and Arab affairs. An Israeli spy captured in Cairo early in 1972 testified that he had been sent to Eritrea to gather intelligence information on the state of the ELF.

In August of 1967, the Israeli advisors stressed that the Arab world was in disarray following their embarrassing defeats in the Sinai and at the expanding borders of Israel. Consequently, the time to attack was ripe. American assault planes bombed and strafed the Western lowlands, an ELF stronghold, and initiated a "pacification program" including about 200 "fortified hamlets." The Second Division, under Brigadier General Merid Bayene, continued with a sporadic scorched earth campaign. Hamlets such as Garabeet, Ashur, Adfaki, Sanheet, Tukumbia, Sawa, and Falkat were practically eliminated. Attempts at arming villages against the ELF also failed when it appeared that most of the guns were getting into their hands. In desperation, General Mariam withdrew and decided to concentrate his forces on strategic areas and abandon those zones of little economic or military consequence. Thus, these battles were won by the ELF.

Nevertheless, the press in Ethiopia said a year later that they "broke the back" of the ELF whose forces they estimated to be only 1,000 men. But how wrong they were. In frustration, bodies of slain ELF soldiers and civilian supporters were publicly hung in Eritrean cities as a warning to others. While this was denied by Ethiopian authorities, some photographs were smuggled out which brought the truth to those interested.

As if to heap insult upon injury, the ELF carried out a daring daylight attack on the Keren-Asmara highway, on November 21, 1970, killing General Teshome Irgetu, the Commander of the Second Division Infantry. His death brought about a quick response and soon American planes were bombing Keren, Eritrea's third largest city, with anti-personnel and napalm bombs; hundreds were killed.

In the past few months Israel has suffered major setbacks in this area of Africa. The rebellion in the southern Sudan, with which it was deeply involved, has been ended with a compromise by the Khartoum and Addis Ababa governments. Both have agreed to curtail the movement of arms into each other's territory. In Uganda, too, the unpredictable Iddi Amin has turned on the Israelis and asked them to leave, even though it is strongly rumored that they were partly behind the coup d'état which brought him to power.

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The United States has been giving military aid to Ethiopia since 1953, just after the federation, which they helped to organize, was implemented. In 1960 a formal secret pact was made between the U.S. State Department and the Ethiopian Government in which the United States "...reaffirmed its continuing interest in the security of Ethiopia and its opposition to any activities threatening the territorial integrity of Ethiopia." There was no mention of what should happen if Ethiopia should threaten someone else's territorial integrity, and two years later Eritrea was formally annexed by the Emperor.

It was at this time that the United States agreed to support a 40,000-man Imperial Army. In 1964 the United States military aid increased again with the shipment of a squadron of F-5 fighter jets and a 55-man counter-insurgency team to deal with the "minor insurgency" in Eritrea. The U.S. Army's "Strike Command" Commander also began his visits around this time. Currently, this Commander visits the Emperor at least once a year, and he "maintains a mobile force to move into danger spots" if need be.

In the past few years, the United States has been giving close to \$13 million per year to Ethiopia in military aid alone, which is greater than any amount given to any other African country. In addition, for economic aid and technical assistance, it gives another \$20 million annually, one of the highest amounts given for this purpose to any of the African countries.

The United States Military Assistance Advisory Group currently maintains about 150-200 officers and men for specialized training in Eritrea, and the Ethiopian Air Force is equipped with both jet fighter and fighter bombers especially suited to counter-insurgency warfare. Although it is denied by the State Department, the Green Beret Special Forces are also reported to be in service in Eritrea. The Ethiopian Navy based at Massawa in Eritrea consists of American-built ships. Massawa is also a center for off-shore oil explorations by Gulf Oil and a Mobil-Esso consortium. The Ralph Parsons Company's* tax exempt mining rights and the more than 200 other American companies in Ethiopia also figure importantly in the American presence.

The other chief American concern in Eritrea, aside from its economic resources and the strategic value of its location at the mouth of the Red Sea, is the Kagnew radio station at Asmara. This

*The Ralph Parsons Company in Los Angeles reports that it no longer has potash and mining operations in Ethiopia. [Ed.]

\$60 million complex is the largest high-frequency station for the United States. It is valued because it is more than one mile high and not far from the equator--factors of importance for radio transmission. Messages from the U.S. military, State Department, and overseas Embassies are relayed by Kagnev. Its main function, however, is as electronic listening post of the Arab world and of many of the socialist countries. Specialists in code deciphering are kept very busy at Kagnev. In 1967 there were approximately 3,200 Americans and their dependents. In 1970, although official publications estimated the number of Americans to be about 3,100, people who had been there felt it was closer to 4,000. This is no ordinary military base, but a vital and important link in the American intelligence system.

In July, 1965, two United States airmen, Cpl. Ronald Dolecki and Chief Warrant Officer Jack Kalbach, were captured by the ELF while the two servicemen were on what was designated as an "aerial mapping survey." Two weeks of searching by 10,000 Ethiopian troops failed to produce the men, who were subsequently released by the ELF.

In March, 1967, a special U.S. State Department task force was set up to watch over the area's "problems." Heavy fighting between the Eritrean Liberation Army and Ethiopian forces broke out between April 23 and May 7, 1969, with the Ethiopian Army hoping to crush the ELA. Stiff resistance was met and six American "advisors" were reported killed. Later in 1969 four Americans allegedly on a National Geographic study team were held by the ELF for sixteen days before being released. Other incidents between the ELF and American servicemen have purportedly occurred, but they are publicly dismissed by the Ethiopians as being the work of "bandits" (shifta).

On February 13, 1970, the American Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, reported that the American Consul General, Murray Jackson, had been kidnapped by the ELF near Asmara. After this, security tightened considerably and Americans were told to travel only in two-car convoys and not to drive far from the Asmara area. By the end of 1970, the Emperor declared a State of Emergency to employ martial law in the province.

In January 1971 the ELF struck at Americans again and ambushed a G.I. from Brooklyn, who was reportedly "delivering U.S. Army mail." General Westmoreland visited there in February 1971 and inspected Army installations and the communications base at Asmara.

More M-16 rifles were requested by the Ethiopians, and this request has been relayed to the United States Congress. In March, 1971, Brigadier General Robert Meyer, Commander of the U.S. Strategic Communications Command, also visited Kagnew in view of increasing the security of the base. These cases can only point to one thing: American involvement is increasing as the ELF grows stronger and bolder and as the Ethiopian Imperial Government is less able to defend itself without outside aid from the United States.

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The First National Congress of the Eritrean Liberation Front took place after ten years of armed struggle. It was attended by about 300 people. During this Conference, the first to be held in liberated Eritrea, new directions were set. A split in 1969 purified the movement by exposing the bourgeois nationalist elements from the revolutionary socialists.* The top three positions--political bureau, military affairs, and foreign affairs--are now in the hands of revolutionaries. True democratic power is in the hands of the people as representatives from the village committees (some walked a month to get to the Congress), women's groups, the soldiers, and other elements all gathered to discuss the coming years of struggle, the strategy, the goals, and the general program. Each day political discussion took almost as much time as marching. There was constant and enthusiastic dialogue, and the works of Mao, Lenin, and Marx are all dog-eared and worn, having passed through innumerable hands. However, although much of the ideology is Maoist, the armaments are Eastern European.

An independent Eritrea under the ELF would resemble the situation in Cuba in that it would be a politically radical state on one hand and geographically isolated on the other. American political and economic interests would also be similar, as well as the relatively strategic importance of Eritrea's physical location. With the Eritrean struggle against neo-colonialism and American imperialism moving steadily ahead, there are realistic hopes for the creation of an island in Africa of socialist democracy and freedom.

*This is not to say that certain splits do not still exist, but only that the "Popular Front" has suffered considerable isolation as a result of the important Congress.

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